

**[Donald M. Currier]**

ORIGINAL MSS. OR FIELD NOTES (CHECK  
ONE)

PUB. WE WORK ON THE WPA

TITLE DONALD M. CURRIER

WRITER SEYMOUR BUCK

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SOURCES GIVEN (?)

COMMENTS

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Submitted by: Seymour D. Buck - Newburyport, Mass.

Name of WPA Worker Interviewed: Donald M. Currier.

WPA Occupation: Laborer-tree climber, on Tree Repair

Project, Local.

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Sketch: Age 34, married, (wife 28); three children, [Carlene?], six; Wilma, age four; Beryl, age 2. Mother pregnant; father supplements WPA work with painting, amateur carpentering, etc., odd-job work.

### INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

This call was made on Sunday, late afternoon. The family had partaken of their evening meal. (Youngsters in back yard finishing their minced ham sandwiches, dipping occasionally into a large sausepan of Za-Rex orange syrup and lukewarm water with their glasses. Immediate occupation consisted of carting a live rabbit around in a broken-down doll carriage, feeding it an occasional piece of carrot for amusement.)

"Hi, there. What the Hell you doing around here this time of day? Well, come on in. Don't stand out there looking at all the junk. Christ, I'll never get this place looking like anything. If Don'd do half 2 the work most husbands do maybe this wouldn't look like a back-house alla time. Come on in."

"Park you fanny over by the window. Christ, there ain't no really cool palce anywhere, is there? Looks kinda like it might rain before night, though. I hope so. Boy, I'm so goddam chafed with all this heat, - and I ain't got a Hell of a lot on, either."

"Don's down cellar trying to hang the door back on the crap can. D'ya know what that bastard did? Mrs Bixby up on High Street give him an order for a coupla window boxes, - and he goes to work and unhitches the door off the crap-can. All varnished nice and all, he gets the bright idea of sawin' that all up into window-boxes. 'By Jesus, "I told him, " she can pay to have 'em.. You're not takin' any doors outa my cellar, not by a damn sight. Go up and take some of the attic floor, if you want to, but b-Christ, leave me a place to hang my bag, anyway."

"Hey, Don," she sang out, leaning toward the cellar door-way, "one of them WPA guys here to see you. Bring up the pot, will you? Baby hasn't been 'po-po' all day. My God,

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seems as if that kid never's like the others. Rash all ober her, cryin' half the night - and drink, - she's had juice poured into her until I'd think she'd start floatin' around here.

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At the sudden clamor in the yard, she darted to the door, leaned her head out, and bellowed, "Don't you kids know it's Sunday? Carlene, - leave go the baby's hand, CARLENE, - Oh, for Christ's sake! H E Y, you, - get in here!

A back-hand slap across the oldest girl's shoulders sent her spinning into the living room. "You park your little fanny in that chair, - and God help you if you move until I tell —"

"Make na-na, - "Carlene whimpered, sliding toward the door.

"For Christ — go on, - get going. DON, - undo her pants, - and come on, - this guy's sick of waiting —"

"Well, look who's here." Currier nodded amiably, and went to the sink. "Shove some to these dishes over, will you, baby, so's I cna clean up?" Tanned elbows and arms held out from his sides, he turned toward his wife.

"Shove 'em yourself," came her swift retort. "If you'd washed 'em before you started in down cellar, they wouldn't be in your way, now. All I got to do around here all the time, and you —"

"Skip it," he said curtly. A slow flush mounted to 4 his temples, and as he rubbed his arms briskly with the cold water, he said to his visitor, "Got your 403 yet? I guess we're done, aren't we? Mike Carey was telling us we'd be lucky if we didn't lose out altogether, the way it looks to him —"

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Wiping his hands on the roller towel he swung around, and said, slowly, "You know, this thing is getting tougher every day. It's one thing to plug like Hell and know you're going to get enough to pay most of your bills, - but the way it si now —"

"Don - where the Hell'd you put my crochet patterns? DON, - seen my patterns? You musta got 'em mixed up with the funnies. I'll bet you tooj 'em down cellar when you took you "daily" DON —"

Currier glanced quickly around the kitchen and spotted the flimsy papers beneath the kitchen table. Slapping them against his overalls he removed the crumbs and dirt. He walked slowly across the kitchen and placed them in his wife's hands. Without a word he returned to his seat at the kitchen and resumed.

"I'm so damned sick and tired of all this being upset all the time, it seems like I'd give anything just to be able to lie down and go to sleep for keepa —"

"Listen," the voice from the adjoining room interrupted caustically, "when you lay down and go to sleep it's because 5 you aint got me around to keep you [movin'?] — Jesus Christ, t'hear you talk anybody'd think this was the life of Reilly I'm leadin' here, with three little bastards fighting and yellin' all day long, and never gettin' out around t'see or t'do anything anymore — who the Hell you think you are, anyway? Whyn't you tell him how you had to marry me, - n' how if it hadn't been for me you'd been a officer or some goddam thing in the Coast Guard b'now, huh?"

"Bee's not feeling well, these days," Currier said gently. "Doctor thinks it may be her kidneys. Some days it'll be o'k. 'n then there's blood 'n stuff comes out. I don't know, - I only wish I could take her simewhere —" his voice trailed off and he rapped a silver knife gently against an empty glass, listening with absorbed attention to the clear tone which filled the room.

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"Say, I meant to ask you when I saw you again, did you ever hear what happened to Tim Murphy? Somebody told me they sent him up for three years, but I never got it straight."

"Well," Currier laughed grimly, "he won't have to worry about lay-offs and stuff, anyway. I went down to the Commissary day before yesterday and they were all out of everything but flour. If I went down there three times a week they'd have just got rid of the last of the 5 butter and oranges. It beats Hell how they never have stuff in down here and up in Haverhill they get every damned thing you can think of, almost. Well, Hell, I guess we're lucky to get any thing, come right down to it. Believe me, the way some of them guys from Joppa hang around the place, they're not missing a bit, I'll tell you now. Bea's mother saw a couple of old maids from up High Street, mind you, - they drove down in their car and parked it over behind the Library and sent the chauffeur in for flour and butter and eggs. Can you beat it?"

Currier shrugged his broad shoulders and pushed his hands deep into his overalls pockets. Stretching his long legs out before him, he said, laughing deep in his chest, "I wish I could wait on 'em just one day. Boy, would some of 'em squawk, though. Tell old lady Nugent, f'rinstance, if she wanted the butter she'd have to take all the cra like the cereals and dried milk, too. Watch her amble up the street huggin' a big bag of that there wheat flour up to her chest, - boy, would she have kittens, huh?"

"That's how it is with the whole thing, though. The ones ought to be gettin' the most aren't gettin' half enough. Why, only last month I got off WPA on my own hook. I been picking up quite a little on the side, odd-jobs 6 and painting and the like. When it folded up on me I got right on, because I'd been willing to get off without being made to. But now they tell me the quota's full up and it don't matter how you got off, - you're off until some son-of-a- bitch down to Boston gets ready to "O.'K." your name.

"How'd I ever come to get on in the first place?" That's easy. They got sick of givin' me relief checks, that's why. I been working ofr Uncle Sam ever since the first CWA project, -

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up at the overhead. Christ, look at my landlord. He was on the City Council. You bet your ass he wasn't going to let me owe rent, - not him. I got a relief slip and he got his rent. Then, when I got on CWA and the kid took down with scarlet fever, - he had me moved out damned quick when I couldn't dig up the five bucks a week - for him!

"I put in for the dredging project, if it ever goes through. Boy, that's a honey. I'm the only guy in Newburyport listed down to the Unemployment Bureau with a Seaman's rating! Bea says she won't let me take the job if it means I got to sleep on the boat, though. She couldn't get along alone, here, - with the kids 'n everything. Her ma said something about taking them with her, but —"

"Listen, Don, You aint got to go into your life's 7 history, you know. After all, it's what I say around here and ma, - or you, either, that goes, - get it, sweetie?"

"How about a bottle of that root-beer, honey? Is any of it cold? Perhaps we could make out better if we had a something to wet our whistles with ——"

"You're wet all right," the voice beyond the door came back sharply. "You know goddam well that stuff blew up - three days ago. I told you not to put so much yeast in it, but you went right ahead just the same, - Beatrice didn't know anything, that's all. And you got to clean them broken pieces of bottle up down cellar before the kids get some in their feet, too, d you hear?"

"I thought there were a few bottles left," Currier apologized, smiling weakly. "I guess it's off, though."

"Am I worrying about what's going to happen? Who isn't? I'll tell you this much, though, brother. These guys out on strike right now aint gonna get what they expect. - they're going to be out of luck, that's all. You can't fight Uncle Sam - and win! BUT - I'm not going hungry, either. They tell me there's not going to be any extra money for Relief. O.K." - his

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voice lowered, and he leaned forward, "There's plenty of grub in the First National, isn't there? What they

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What they going to do if you just walk in and pick what you want right up, - and walk out again? Boy, - they better not leave whole chickens and hams and stuff in the windows Saturday nights, I'm telling you, now.

"Arrested?" How you going to pinch fifty - a hundred guys, all hungry and afraid of nothing? Like Hell, brother, like Hell.

"What's the sense of our talking like that? Things aren't going to get that bad, not much. Maybe these birds around here do think there's jobs for us. - and maybe there are. Maybe we can make as much on our own as WPA -"

"Look who's talking," his wife shouted shrilly, moving to stand in the kitchen doorway. "You boys been yappin' for damn near an hour. Come on, you get your kids in bed, and then you can yap until morning for all of me. I'm going over to ma's. I got to have some help measuring this flannel. Listen, Don, - you keep to Hell out of the baby's bank, you hear? You aint goin' out calloopin' just because one of your WPA friends drops in for an evening, hear?"

"It's Sunday, honey," Currier advised gently. "Besides, we aren't in the need of such stimulants? We got enough to keep us excited without booze. Carlene - Wilma - Baby - Come in, now, - time to get your shut-eye. Come on, now."

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["?"] "That's done, thank the Lord. Jesus, is there anything worse than trying to stick kids into hot beds with the sun still pouring into the room and not a breath of air stirring? Christ, I don't blame 'em for walking around and hiding under the beds, but it sure gets Bea all upset. I wish I could get somebody to look at her. The city Doctor was up a couple of

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weeks ago and all he did was give her some pills and tell her she ought to drink more water and be out in the air more. Maybe a trip up to the Mountains, - or a week at the Beach wouldn't hurt, - " his laugh was bitter, and in his eyes the gleam was hard and cold.

"Fed up" Who, me?" He laughed. "Hell, that's life, guy. Maybe some people get a kick out of thinking they run their own business and know what's going to happen to 'em, but they're wrong. It's all doped out, - what the Hell's the use of killing yourself trying to get somewhere, - be somebody, - if it's all on the books that you're going to work when there's work and loaf when there isn't, - pay your bills when, as and if you can, - and some day they'll look at you and say, "He looks pretty good, at that, but I don't remember them lines on his face." Get it? I'm sorry I got the kids, that's all. They keep Bea all upset all the time, - and what the Hell they got ahead of them? Marry, - have kids anyway, - and watch some other guy hang around 10 the house all day until everything busts up, - or they just go out and croak themselves? Hell, look at me. I started out to be somebody, in the Coast Guard. I wasn't running around more than two years before I met up with Bea, - Christ, the first thing I knew she was in trouble, - and that ended me, too. Ever since, it seems like I've just got a little older and been a little worse off, that's all.

"I was thinking not over two months ago, - why the heck shouldn't I get in a bid on this painting there doing in City Hall? There's Perkins, in the Council, - he's a painter and he bid in and got three rooms. Christ, for the money he painted them offices I could have done the job, O.K. too, - and paid for the paint myself, and made a good thing out of it. When I went to see the Mayor, he told me, "Sure, Currier. I'd like to see a young fellow get ahead. Give Pat Welch your bid, but make it fair, boy, make it fair."

"Know what he wanted? Pat Welch's wife's Perkins' sister. Pat would have had my bid, - and then Perkins' bid would have been about five bucks below mine. Fine chance you got, these days, trying to get anywhere honestly, I'm telling you.



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"Maybe if Bea wasn't sick all the time, I could get along better. Seems like every night I got to spend most 11 of my time getting the house straightened out. She tries hard, I know, - Hell, they got a WPA Housekeepers' Project, - but the doctor wouldn't give her an O.K. as needing one, - she thinks because he's afraid she'll think she's got some fatal disease or something. It's only when her ma invites her to ride in to Marlborough week-ends, or up to Lake [Winnepesaukee?] or something that she feels good at all. Then when she gets home she's all done up. I don't know, I'm afraid maybe she's got something pretty awful, but I don't know. I try not to bother her, nights, - but Jesus you'd think once out of thirty days she'd want me to mug her up a little, - waomen are funny, though, aren't they?

"Afraid of getting caught? Hell, brother, I've never stayed with her, - since the Christ only knows when. Still, - there's the baby, so I don't know. It's just one of those things, I guess.

"You were asking how did I feel about getting a job again. Sure, I'm all for it. But where are they? If I had the money to get the right tools and stuff and pay for my rigger's license and all, I know I could make damned good dough summer's painting and such like. Every way you turn you got to have a license, - and you got to look like something before you can get the work to do. Then, when it gets colder weather, where do you get off?

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Boy, I hate to think of this winter. We got a radio, now, and an oil burner in the kitchen stove. I'll bet old man Creeden expects me to sell the radio before he gives me a slip, - come need for an order, again.

"Bea's got the right dope, - you know Marshall, the insurance man? He's on the Welfare Board, now, you know. She says tell him we got to let the insurance go unless we can get a grocery order! I hate to do like that, - but Jesus what you going to do? Any racket that works - is a good one. Guys don't make money without there's some kind of a racket behind it, you know that, brother.

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"What's the best job I ever had? Boy, - back in the days when prohibition had 'em all panting. Boy, I made the dough, then. I knew every creek and inlet between here and Portland.. That was how come I lost my job with Uncle Sam. They never pinned anything on me, and the mistake I made was in not getting cozy with the skipper, - so I could make some real dough.

"After that, - mostly shipping as a deck hand. Then when Bea got K.O'd I had to find something here in town. Usher in the local theatre, - our famous "Premier Theater" [-?] keepin' couples from doing too much heavy necking up in nigger Heaven, - and showing excited old maids the way to the Ladies' Room. It's funny, the way those dames have to take a leak every time there's a "hot" romance 13 on, you know it?

"Hell, now I'm just hanging on. Take it a day at a time, that's me. I'm not asking anything but a roof over my head and two squares a day, - excepting it's maybe to get Bea so she doesn't ride me all the time. I'm not blaming her," he added hastily, "but it sure makes it awful to